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SUBJECT: ANTI-TIP INITIATIVES IN LITHUANIA

REF: VILNIUS 683

SUMMARY

1. Lithuanian law enforcement recently broke up two cross-border trafficking groups and announced the creation of a new department to increase international cooperation. Partly as a result of such increasingly frequent busts, media attention to TIP issues is growing. GOL representatives, NGOs, and church officials have been active in trying to ensure that those at risk are aware of the dangers. We continue to highlight this issue and promote anti-trafficking efforts through public outreach, public speaking, and cooperation with NGOs. END SUMMARY.

Busting trade in women

2. Lithuanian police's intensified campaign against TIP (reftel) continues. Most recently, in late November, the police detained at least five owners and employees of Lithuanian modeling agencies amidst allegations that the agencies were fronts for human trafficking to Western Europe and the UAE. According to media reports, one agency delivered women and underage girls to UAE-based Sultan International, which "organizes parties for sheiks." Authorities have charged the owner of another modeling agency for selling women to traffickers for up to EUR 10,000.

Press attention to TIP

3. The mainstream Lithuanian press has seized upon TIP-related issues as a way both to serve the public good by raising awareness and to increase circulation by printing sensational stories. A series of front-page articles has appeared in Lithuania's largest daily illuminating the experiences of women working in strip clubs or as prostitutes in the United Kingdom, Austria and Germany. These articles, in some cases, have done law enforcement's homework, providing background that the police have used as a foundation for subsequent investigations and arrests.

Working women

4. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) announced the results of a survey of 200 Lithuanians who had been involved in sex work overseas. Seventy-six percent of the women interviewed had fallen into the work in response to promises of employment in non-sexual services. Sixteen percent were under eighteen years old, and only eight percent were over thirty.

Keeping the pressure on

5. TIP issues continue to attract high-profile attention from GOL politicians and community groups:

- MP Ona Valiukeviciute, the head of the parliamentary human rights committee, held a series of press conferences on human trafficking;

- Lithuanian MPs have organized a meeting with their Nordic counterparts for the first week in December to discuss regional matters, including trafficking;

- The Interior Ministry arranged a bilateral meeting with a visiting official from the UK on trafficking, highlighting their close and successful intergovernmental cooperation;

- Vytautas Grigaravicius, the national police chief, announced the creation of a special unit charged with investigating TIP cases and building ties with foreign law enforcement; and

- The Kaunas Catholic Archdiocese hosted a news conference,

calling on priests in this overwhelmingly Catholic country to inform their parishioners and other community members about the threats of trafficking.

Embassy efforts

16. TIP-related cooperation remains a central feature of our Mission's public outreach. Two police officers responsible for breaking up a major human trafficking ring in June (reftel) were special guests of Ambassador Mull at the Mission's July 4 event, and he recognized their accomplishments and the importance of their work in his speech. We continue to work with NGOs, including the IOM and the Lithuanian-U.S. Initiative, to heighten awareness in at-risk populations.

Comment

17. Lithuania is intensifying its battle against TIP predators. EU accession has made it easier for traffickers to operate, but has also increased law enforcement cooperation. A vigorous effort from the police and media to expose and break up trafficking rings has helped to raise public awareness. We will continue to work closely with both the GOL and various NGOs on trafficking and to emphasize it in our public outreach.
KELLY